

# Powder Point Bridge

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(The following article is the third in a series of excerpts from the Duxbury Rural & Historical Society's book, *Duxbury A Guide* by Katherine Pillsbury.)

Today's summer visitors enjoy driving over Duxbury's unique Long Bridge to reach the beach. The bridge, said to be the longest wooden bridge in the country, is actually not as old as it looks, nor has it always been there.

For 200 years there was no bridge linking Duxbury to the beach, nor was there any thought of building one. With water transportation more important than land, skippers expected unimpeded access to the Back River. When Duxbury residents wanted to cut wood or fish from the beach, they went by boat.

All that changed after the Civil War. Like Allen's plans for the Standish Shore, the Wright's plans for the beach development included improving transportation. The proposed house lots would be far more accessible if a bridge were built from the mainland. They also considered bringing a trolley or railroad line right to the west end of the proposed bridge on Powder Point. The Wrights had bought acreage on the south side of Powder Point which had once belonged to the Westons. They planned to subdivide that as well.

The Wrights petitioned the state for permission to construct a 2,200-foot long wooden bridge from the top of Powder Point to the beach. In 1887 the state approved the plans and the Gurnet Bridge Company was incorporated.

Some Duxbury residents objected strenuously, but the Wrights and their supporters prevailed. After William J. Wright offered to pay one third the cost of building the bridge, Duxbury town meeting members also approved the plans, 65 to 45. The Gurnet Bridge was built on oak pilings, with a draw in the center to allow for passage of vessels to and from the Back River. It opened to the public with a townwide celebration in 1892. Residents soon began calling it Long Bridge, or Powder Point Bridge, rather than its official name of Gurnet Bridge.



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At first the town of Duxbury shared ownership of the bridge with neighboring towns, but it took sole responsibility for its maintenance in 1939 and sole ownership two years later.

The original bridge needed yearly maintenance to repair the damage caused by violent storms. In the 1980s, with the bridge approaching the century mark and traffic increasing, residents grew concerned about its safety and high maintenance costs. Several times the bridge was closed to traffic as repairs were made. Then, in 1985, there was a serious fire. The bridge was closed for repairs in June and July. It was reopened July 20, but three days later state inspectors discovered that the underlying pilings had deteriorated badly. They ordered the bridge shut down immediately.

As residents debated the most practical and economical course of action, it became obvious that there was strong feeling in town in favor of building, not a modern steel bridge, but a new wooden bridge like the old. The bridge, they felt, was an asset to the town, contributing to the atmosphere and quality of life in Duxbury. Most people who drove or walked over it, or who fished there, liked it the way it always had been.

Thanks to the careful research and dedication of the town appointed Bridge Committee, an affordable proposal for tearing down the old bridge and building a new one was placed before Town Meeting. The 3.2 million dollar bond issue to finance the project was approved easily. The new bridge was completed in August 1986. It looked like the old one, but was wider, higher, and stronger, being built of tropical hardwoods. It stands ready to replace the old bridge as a historic landmark.